

new music concerts presents
the music of
Erwin Schulhoff



Sunday, February 5, 1995, 3:00 pm
Art Gallery of Ontario, Walker Court

**New Music Concerts presents Lost Composers II:
Works from the Dada and Jazz Periods of Erwin Schulhoff
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Art Gallery of Ontario, Walker Court**

New Music Concerts continues its exploration of the music of composers who lost their lives through world strife with a concert of music by **Erwin Schulhoff**.

Erwin (later known as *Ervín*) Schulhoff was born in Prague on June 8th, 1894. The offspring of a German-Jewish merchant father, his paternal grandfather was the pianist Julius Schulhoff (1825-98); his mother's family included the concertmaster of a theatre orchestra in Frankfurt-am-Main. It was through these family connections that the talented young pianist was brought to the attention of Antonín Dvořák. The encouragement he received from him inspired him to pursue an interest in composition that lead to many years of study in Vienna, Leipzig, Cologne and Paris. Among his teachers were prominent piano pedagogues (Kaan, Willy Thern, Teichmüller, Friedberg), musical theoreticians (Krehl, Steinbach, Schiedemayr) and famous composers (Reger, Debussy).

At the age of nineteen his abilities as a pianist were recognized in Berlin through the awarding of the prestigious Felix Mendelssohn Prize. The Wüllner Prize, bestowed upon him in the same year, afforded him the opportunity to pursue graduate studies, an activity that was foreshortened by the outbreak of war. He served in the Austrian Army and saw action at both the Russian and Italian fronts. Twice wounded in battle, his experience of war nurtured in him a growing sense of irony and cynicism which lead him to espouse a pacifist, even anarchist philosophy that found its creative expression through his close association with the Dada movement then flourishing in Zürich, Berlin and Dresden. After winning a second Mendelssohn Prize in 1918 for his *Piano Sonata*, he became a founding member of Dresden's "Werkstatt der Zeit" (Contemporary Workshop), the purpose of which was to present the most progressive music of the time. He devoted himself to a close study of the music of Schoenberg, Scriabin and Stravinsky and kept up a lively correspondence with Alban Berg. He became particularly fascinated with American Jazz and its enervating influence permeated his subsequent compositions.

In 1920 he accepted a position as professor of piano in Saarbrücken and it was there that he met his wife Alice. They returned to Berlin in 1922, where their only child, Peter, was born. After a short time Schulhoff felt increasingly isolated in Berlin and resolved to return home to Prague and become once more a part of its vibrant musical culture. His *Violin Sonata* and *Sextet* received prestigious premieres there in 1924.

In addition to his growing fame as a composer Schulhoff was equally celebrated as a pianist, noted for his "excellent technique, incisive rhythmic acuity and artful touch". He made numerous recordings for international radio networks of both his own music and that of others. His activities in this regard ranged from the controversial quarter-tone compositions of Alois Hába to the latest jazz idioms, and included an absolute mastery of the classical repertoire. His talents proved lucrative in this regard, leading to many engagements abroad, particularly in Germany, until 1933.

Schulhoff's reaction to the rise of the Nazis in Germany was to embrace Communism. He composed a cantata to texts from Marx's *Communist Manifesto*, wrote a series of revolutionary songs, and dedicated symphonies to Socialist causes. As German forces bore down upon Bohemia he abandoned Prague to work in Slovakia. In 1941 he and his family were granted Soviet citizenship but were arrested by the Nazis on the eve of their departure. Subsequently tortured for both his racial origins and Communist sympathies, Schulhoff died of tuberculosis in a concentration camp at Wülzburg in Bavaria on August 18th, 1942.

The concert will feature two of Schulhoff's most celebrated works for chamber ensemble, the *Concertino* of 1925 and a *Divertissement* written the following year; the Dada-esque *Bassnachtigall* for solo contrabassoon in a performance by Toronto Symphony bassoonist Fraser Jackson; and two appearances by pianist Andrew Burashko, who will offer a pair of jazz-influenced works written in 1930: excerpts from piano suite, *Esquisses de jazz*, and a complete performance of Schulhoff's *Hot Sonate* with alto saxophonist David Tanner.

The concert, presented in the centrally-located Walker Court, begins at 3:00 pm and is free upon admittance to the Art Gallery of Ontario, 317 Dundas St. West. (Telephone 979-6648)

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Erwin Schulhoff

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